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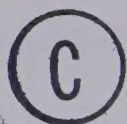
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'Ἐν τῇ εἰδός' in the Meno and Euthyphro

by



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The undersigned certify that they have read,
and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for
acceptance, a thesis entitled " 'Εν τῷ εἰςος ' in
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Abstract

Plato develops a method for answering questions of the form 'What is x?' in the Meno. He develops a different method in the Euthyphro. What underpins both methods is the assumption that the many things of a certain kind are what they are because of some one thing which they have. And given the assumption, that which 'the many' have can be said to be that which is what 'the many' are; for the many would not be what they are unless they had that some one thing. The purpose of this study is to analyse this assumption.

It follows from the assumption that 'the many' are defined as 'xes', because they have 'x'. But one cannot come to know what 'x-itself' is in this manner. For a thing is to be defined not as itself, but as something else - justice is said to be a virtue. This problem of coming to know what 'x-itself' is is expressed by Meno's paradox.

In the Meno, Plato assumes that 'virtue-itself' is that which is common to the things which are virtues. This model is incoherent, because one would have to know which things are virtues before one could know that which is common to them.

In the Euthyphro, Plato proposes that one state the thing which pious actions must have to be pious. That thing will be common to pious actions; but common only because it is essential.

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Introduction

Socrates often complains that all he knows is that he does not know. One might admire Socrates for knowing himself to such an extent, and for being so willing to learn from anyone who truly does know. There is, though, one small point about the Socratic endeavor that might leave one a bit puzzled. How can he who does not know anything at all tell those who answer his questions that they do not know either?

Other than knowing that he does not know, there is something else which Socrates thinks that he knows. He thinks that he knows what kind of answer should be given to a certain kind of question. Those who attempt to answer for Socrates a question of the form 'What is x ?' often find their answers rejected on the ground that what they have said is not the right kind of answer. What Meno says about virtue is over-turned for this reason. What Euthyphro says about piety is over-turned for the same reason.

Socrates tells us that he does not want the 'many', and instead is looking for the 'one'. Others, on Socrates' behalf, tell us that he wishes to be given definitions. These two themes are investigated in this study.

At 72c of the Meno, Socrates says that Meno should tell him the *ἐν τῇ εἰδός*¹ of virtues - the some one *εἰδός* of virtues. At 6d of the Euthyphro, he says that Euthyphro should teach him the *εἰδός* of 'piety-itself' (*αὐτὸ τὸ εἰδός*). In each case, Socrates assumes that an *εἰδός* is some one thing which another might be able to tell him about.

A methodology of some sort is prior to philosophical problems. Ordinary language is rich and varied enough to allow both the question 'What is virtue?' and answers to it. Before one can get to the philosophical problems, one needs a method which will exclude ordinary answers; a method which requires philosophical answers. The ordinary man is then left in a rather odd position. Whatever he might say is immediately trampled on.

One can answer a question like 'What is an electron microscope?' in one of two ways: either by pointing to something and saying 'There is an electron microscope', or by saying 'It is a microscope which projects onto a fluorescent screen the greatly enlarged image of an object held in the path of a sharply focused electron beam'. Since Socrates wishes to have definitions rather than examples, the first way is excluded. His reason is that

1. This phrase could be translated as 'some one form'. The noun '*εἰδός*' is derived from the verb '*εἶδω*' - to see. So, the basic sense could be said to be 'that which is seen'. But the use which Plato makes of '*εἰδός*' is quite removed from its ordinary sense.

he wishes to be told the 'one' instead of the 'many'.

(But does not he who points to a thing point only to one thing?) Socrates might also want to have the second way excluded. Since the definition applies to any electron microscope, it can apply to 'many'. Perhaps Socrates wishes to have better questions rather than better answers; questions like 'What is electron-microscope-itself?'.

It may be of significance that Socrates pays the most attention to questions of the form 'What is x?' rather than questions of the form 'What is an x?'. When one asks 'What is an x?', one invites an answer of the form 'An x is such-and-such'. But this does not mean that Socrates' demand for the 'one' is securely tied to the 'What is x?' question.

Would not we answer the question 'What is Red Deer?' by saying 'A city'? It is hard to see how the 'one' and the 'many' could be in opposition inside this answer. Perhaps the question 'What is virtue?' is like 'What is life?', 'What is love?' and 'What is truth?'. But such questions, when voiced, only hurt the ears of good philosophers.

We come now to the thesis I wish to forward: Socrates' demand for the 'one' can be satisfied, only if 'What is x?' questions mean something they do not mean; only if 'What is x?' means 'Which thing is x?'. If this reduction is valid, then there is something which is what

the many virtues are, another thing which is what the many pious thing are, and so on.

I would like to give here a few words of explanation about some of the things in this study. Wherever possible, I do not translate εἶδος . My purpose is only to show that Plato believes that there is something which is what other things are. I think that it is more important to see what is meant by 'ἐν τι' than it is to see what is meant by 'εἶδος' . I grant that 'εἶδος' had an ordinary use in the Greek language. But this is all the more reason for not translating it. The ordinary meaning of 'εἶδος' would not have been strong enough to do the philosophic work Plato requires of it. Quite simply, Plato is giving a philosophic meaning to 'εἶδος' in the Meno and Euthyphro. So, until we have seen how he goes about this, we cannot translate the word. And once we have seen him do it, we will know what he means.

In chapter one, I talk of 'being acquainted with a thing' and 'knowledge by acquaintance'. To understand what I mean by 'knowledge by acquaintance', the reader need only consider two expressions. One of them is the question 'What is this?'. We can suppose that he who has occasion to ask this question can identify, specify, or make secure the reference to 'this'. That is to say that he knows the thing to which he is refer-

ring and about which he is asking. What he does not know is what the thing is. The other expression is 'I saw this thing last week, but I do not know what it is'. What underlies both of these expressions is a difference between knowing a thing and knowing what the thing is. The former I term 'knowledge by acquaintance'.

This study focuses on 70a-73d and 80c-81e of the Meno and 5c-11b of the Euthyphro. In the first of these passages a methodology for answering a 'What is x?' question is given. We find Meno's paradox and the theory of recollection in the second. In the Euthyphro, Socrates again sets forth a method for answering a 'What is x?' question. I will argue that the methodology stated in the Euthyphro is not the same as the methodology stated in the Meno. I think that the former is coherent, while the latter is incoherent. Let me now give a synopsis of the study.

Meno's paradox and the theory of recollection are discussed in the first chapter. Although the theory of recollection is given as a solution to the paradox, I argue that both the theory and the paradox rest on the assumption that knowing a thing (being acquainted with a thing) is sufficient for knowing what the thing is.

In the second chapter, I discuss the question 'Can virtue be taught?'. At issue is whether this question can have an ordinary use. My argument is intended

to foreclose on the move from 'Can you teach me virtue?' to 'Can you teach me what virtue is?'. This will lead into a discussion of the 'What is x?' question.

I discuss in the third chapter the methodology which is given in the Meno. Meno is asked to state that which is common to all instances of virtue. On this ground alone, I argue that the request cannot possibly be fulfilled, if the point of the request is to be told what virtue is.

The methodology of the Euthyphro is coherent, because he who answers a 'What is x?' question states that which is x-itself rather than stating that which is common to many xes. At 11b, we find Socrates making a distinction between '*οὐσία*' and '*πάθος*'. I argue that this distinction undercuts the 'that which is common' model of saying what a thing is. It is in chapter four that I take up the Euthyphro.

In the final chapter, I review some of the literature on these two dialogues. The work which I give the most attention to is R. Robinson's Plato's Earlier Dialectic.

All Greek transcriptions are from the Oxford edition of the Meno and Euthyphro.

Chapter I

A discussion of Meno's paradox
and the theory of recollection

The Meno moves between two questions. One is 'Can virtue be taught?'; the other is 'What is virtue?'. The former is introduced by Meno at the very beginning of the dialogue. He says,

ἔχεις μοι εἰπεῖν, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἄρα διδακτὸν ἢ ἀρετῇ; ἢ οὐ διδακτὸν ἀλλ' ἀσκητόν; ἢ οὔτε ἀσκητόν οὔτε μαθητόν, ἀλλὰ φύσει παραχίγνεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἢ ἄλλω τινὶ τρόπῳ. (70a1).¹

Socrates is, at the outset, unwilling to take up any part of Meno's question. He urges that he and Meno should first inquire about what virtue is. Socrates says,

ἐμαυτὸν καταμέμφομαι ὥς οὐκ εἰδὼς περὶ ἀρετῆς τὸ παράπαν· ὃ δὲ μὴ οἶδα τί ἐστίν. πῶς ἂν ὁποῖόν γέ τι εἰδείην; ἢ δοκεῖ σοι οἶόν τε εἶναι ὅστις Μένωννα μὴ γιγνώσκει τὸ παράπαν ὅστις ἐστίν, τοῦτον εἰδέναι εἴτε καλὸς εἴτε πλούσιος εἴτε καὶ γενναῖός ἐστιν, εἴτε καὶ τὰναντία τούτων; (71b2).²

1. Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue can be taught, or is it not taught but acquired by practice; or is it neither acquired by practice or learned, but comes to man by nature or in some other way?
2. ...I reproach myself for not knowing anything about virtue. And if I do not know what it is, how can I know some property of it. Or does it seem to you possible that someone who does not know at all who Meno is could know whether he is handsome or rich or well-born or the opposite of these?

Socrates has given not only a reason for setting the one investigation in advance of the other, but he has also given an analogy in terms of which the reason is to be understood.

This analogy between Meno and virtue is an unhappy one. It suggests that just as Meno is some one man so virtue is some one thing, and that knowing what virtue is is like knowing who Meno is. If Socrates' reason is to be understood in this way, two problems arise. In the first place, Socrates is not asking "What is virtue?", as he purports, rather he is asking "Which thing is virtue?". In the second place, one might know the thing which is virtue, without knowing what virtue is. This would be analogous to knowing, for example, that Meno is the fellow sitting next to Socrates, while not knowing what he is - not knowing that he is a general.

These problems can be avoided in two different ways. One can deny that the analogy between Meno and virtue is a strict analogy. Or, one can affirm that to know the thing which is virtue is to know what virtue is. Plato adopts the latter way. He assumes that virtue is some one thing which can be known in a way that is similar to knowing who Meno is. That Plato does hold this position can be shown in two ways. First, it can be shown that the theory of recollection rests on the

assumption that acquaintance with a thing is sufficient for coming to know what the thing is. I will try to show this in this chapter. Second, it can be shown that Plato assumes that a question of the form 'What is x?' is the same as a question of the form 'Which thing is x?'. This will be taken up in the fourth and fifth chapters.

Since the theory of recollection is supposed to be a solution to Meno's paradox, I will analyse that passage in which the paradox is stated (80d1 - 80e5). For reasons which will become evident, I will give careful attention to how ¹ 'ζητῶ', ² 'ὅ', and ³ 'ὅτι' are used. Before I consider the paradox and the theory, I will consider what 'ζητῶ' means.

'Ζητῶ' has a number of senses. Some of them are not relevant. But, we can be fairly certain of how 'ζητῶ' is being used. The noun 'ζητησις' is used by Socrates in that passage wherein the paradox is stated. 'Ζητησις' can mean either 'a search' or 'an inquiry'. So, I will assume that 'to look for' and 'to ask about' are the two basic senses of 'ζητῶ'. Let us first consider 'to look for'.

The purpose of any search is to find something.

1. See the following paragraph.
2. 'Which'
3. 'Whichever', 'What'.

This point is so obvious that we need only observe and not argue for it. There is another point which is just as obvious. One cannot search for something about which one knows nothing. When one is looking for a thing, one must know something about that for which one is looking. This second point can be put in a different way. If someone says that he is looking for something, he must be able to say something about the thing for which he is looking. Now, the question we should consider is this: What sort of knowledge makes it possible for one to look for a thing?

What one knows about a thing which is being sought cannot be knowledge of where the thing is. Such knowledge would not make possible searching, rather such knowledge would preclude searching.

Suppose that I am looking for something, and that I would like Jake to help me look for it. What should I tell him so that he too can look for the thing? It will not be enough for me to say that I am looking for something. Allow that I am looking for my pen, and that I tell Jake "I am looking for my pen". Now, Jake might know what my pen looks like, but then he might not know. If he does know, I have said all that I need to say. Suppose that he does not know. I shall have to provide a description of my pen before he can help me. And so I say "It is black, slim, six-sided, brassy at one end,

and silvery at the other end".

I have told Jake that I am looking for something which is a pen, and which is black, slim, etc. Need I have told him that I am looking for a pen; could I have said only that the thing (I am looking for) is black, slim, etc.? If I said only that it is black, slim, etc., could he then look for the thing? The problem which I have just raised is this: Does one have to know what a thing is to look for it? I do not think so.

Allow that Jake brings me something which fits the description that I gave of my pen. There are three possibilities: he brings me my pen; or he brings me a pen which fits the description but which is not my pen; or he brings me something which fits the description but which is not a pen. If the second possibility comes about, I might say to him "That is not my pen". Since we have assumed that Jake has brought me a pen which fits the description, the description thereby applies to both my pen and the one Jake has brought me. So, if I say "That is not mine", I can, presumably, give a more complete description which fits my pen but not the one which Jake has brought.

But whatever description I give of my pen, that description could apply to another as well. This does not mean that Jake might not ever be able to find my pen. If it does mean this, then even I might not be able

to ever find it; there could be a point at which I might not be able to distinguish 'this' pen from 'that' pen as my pen. That is to say that whatever description I give of mine could fit another pen as well.

Let us now discuss the third possibility. Suppose that Jake does not know what a pen is, but that he brings me something which fits the description. We have to consider two questions: Has Jake been looking for something, and has Jake been looking for a pen? To the latter question, we should answer "No". What if we answer "No" to the former? Well, then one could not search for anything at all unless one knew what the thing which is being sought is. This, though, is counter-intuitive.

Let me give another example. The police could know that a murder weapon is black, long, cylindrical, and heavy, because of a long, even, deep crease in the victim's skull and because of traces of black paint on his skull. The weapon could be a lead-pipe, a night-stick, a leg of a chair, or whatever. But, the police need not know of which sort the weapon is to look for something which fits the description.

The latter example suggests that there is a difference between knowing the thing for which one is looking and knowing what that thing is, and that the former kind of knowing is all that is required for

searching. One can look for something which is a pen, but one can also look for something which is black, slim, etc. And if these examples are only suggestive, there is a certain kind of statement and a certain kind of question which would not make any sense at all, if the distinction between knowing the thing and knowing what the thing is were not available in ordinary language.

Statements like 'I saw this thing last week, but I do not know what it is' would not make any sense at all, if there were not a difference between knowing the thing (or being acquainted with the thing) and knowing what the thing is; similarly with the question 'What is this?'. He who is asked to answer such a question cannot answer until he knows which thing is being referred to and asked about. The onus to make clear which thing is being referred to lies with him who asked the question. The reference to 'this' can be secured by pointing. It can also be secured by describing 'this'.

It is obvious that the knowledge which makes possible pointing and saying 'this' precludes searching. So, the conclusion we can draw is that description makes possible searching and finding. But it might now be asked whether there can be a description of 'what it is to be a pen', and whether one could find a pen by finding something which fits such a description. Such a description would not be a description of 'this' particu-

lar pen or 'that' particular pen, but rather a description of any pen. At this point, some people are moved to wonder whether there can be a description of 'penness-itself'. We need not resolve their wonder. It is enough to say that knowing what it is to be a pen is not sufficient for finding a particular pen. Even if Jake knows what it is to be a pen, he thereby does not know enough to look for my pen. And even if he does not know what it is to be a pen, he can nevertheless look for something which fits the description which I have given of my pen.

Plato makes the activity of looking for something appear paradoxical by confuting 'knowing what a thing is' with 'knowing the thing' - by making the activity of looking for something seem like coming to know what the thing is; or in yet other words, by making knowledge by acquaintance seem like knowledge of what a thing is. For this reason, it is important to see how 'ὅ' and 'ὅ τε' are being used. One can look for something which is a pen, but one cannot look for what a pen is.

Meno's paradox is set forth in the passage 80d1 - 80e5. I will analyse those statements of the passage in which either 'ὅ' or 'ὅ τε' occurs. I will begin with the assumption that 'ζητῶ' means 'to look for'.

The passage begins with Socrates saying "...

περὶ ἀρετῆς ὃ ἔστιν ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ οἶδα ... (80d1).¹

If Socrates were talking about Aristotle, he would have said "I do not know who he is". The point is that if 'ὃ' is to be translated as 'which', Socrates is not saying that he does not know what virtue is; rather he is saying that he does not know that (thing) which is virtue. On the other hand, the use which Socrates makes of 'περὶ ἀρετῆς'² could count against translating 'ὃ' as 'which'. One can say "I do know Jake, but I do not know anything about him"; or "I am acquainted with Jake, but I do not know anything about him". So, the phrase 'περὶ ἀρετῆς' might very well preserve Socrates' claim that he does not know what virtue is. But the phrase commits Socrates to observing a distinction between 'knowing a thing' and 'knowing what the thing is'. We will see that Socrates does not observe this distinction.

Socrates goes on to say "... ἐθέλω μετὰ σοῦ ... συζητῆσαι ὅτι ποτέ ἐστιν ..." (80d3).³ Since one cannot look for what a thing is, we should read 'συζητῆσαι' as taking a pronoun in the accusative. The pronoun should be understood as referring to the thing which is

1. "Concerning virtue, I do not know what/which (thing) it is."
2. "Concerning virtue"
3. "To look for (something) with another."

being looked for. Another reason for translating the statement in this way is 'συζητῆσαι' is a transitive verb. So, Socrates is saying "I am willing to look for the thing which it (virtue) is with you". This statement prepares the way for the paradox. Socrates here assumes that virtue is some one thing for which he can look.

If we consider carefully what Meno says, we will see that he does not state the paradox. The paradox is, in fact, stated by Socrates. What Meno is saying is this: ... τίνα τρόπον ζητήσεις ... τοῦτο¹ ὃ μὴ οἶσθα τὸ παράπαν ὅτι ἐστίν; (80d5). (The 'ὅ' is surely to be read as 'which', because 'τοῦτο'¹ occurs in the governing clause. The verb is again transitive. So, we can observe as a condition for translating 'ὅ' as 'which' that a transitive verb occur in the governing clause.) Thus, Meno is saying "How will you look for that, which you know not at all what it is?".

If Meno is using 'τοῦτο' to refer indefinitely, then he is asking 'How will you look for something about which you know not at all what it is?'. The force of this question would seem to be 'How will you look for something about which you know nothing at all?'. But,

1. 'τοῦτο' is a demonstrative pronoun.

'τοῦτο' could have definite reference.¹ I think that it does; that Meno uses it to refer to the thing which is virtue. If Meno had wished to refer indefinitely, he would, most likely, have used 'τι'.² But, there is a better reason than this. Meno implicitly draws the distinction between 'knowing a thing' and 'knowing what the thing is'. He is asking about how one comes to know what a thing is.

Meno goes on to reformulate his question. He says "... εἰ καὶ ὅτι μάλιστα ἐντύχοις αὐτῷ πῶς εἴσῃ ὅτι τοῦτό ἐστιν ὃ σὺ οὐκ ᾔδυσθα". (80d7) This can be translated as "Even if it is the case that you happen upon that (thing), how will you know that it is this which you did not know?".

I have translated 'ἐντύχοις' as 'you happen upon', but 'ἐντυγχάνω' can also mean 'to find'. 'ἐντυγχάνω' stands to 'εὐρίσκω' in Greek as 'to happen upon' stands to 'to find' in English. Like 'to happen upon', 'ἐντυγχάνω' expresses the notion of finding something by chance or through accident. Yet

1. It is Bluck's opinion as well that 'τοῦτο' has definite reference. About the phrase 'τοῦτο δ' μή οἶσθα' he says "τοῦτο has a definite reference. The μή is due to the fact that the clause is virtually conditional, equivalent in meaning to εἰ τοῦτο μή οἶσθα". (If you do not know this - my translation.) Plato's Meno, p. 271. Presumably, then, 'τοῦτο' refers to virtue. But why does not the pronoun agree in gender with 'ἀρετή'? Quite simply, 'τοῦτο' refers to the thing which is virtue.
2. 'τι' is an indefinite pronoun.

Meno's use of *ἐντυγχάνω* goes deeper than this. He uses it to express the notion of 'finding a thing which one does not know (what it is)'. We can imagine one person saying to another "Look what I have found. Do you know what it is?". So, Meno could very well mean "Even if you are acquainted with virtue...", when he says *εἰ καὶ ὅτι μάλιστα ἐντύχοις αὐτῷ...*. For this reason, I say that Meno is not using *τοῦτο* to refer indefinitely; nor is *αὐτῷ*¹ being used indefinitely. And behind this reason is the ordinary usage of these terms.

Consider the last part of the reformulation: ...
*πῶς εἴσῃ ὅτι τοῦτό ἐστιν ὃ σὰ οὐκ ᾔδῃσθα.*²
 The phrase *ὃ σὰ οὐκ ᾔδῃσθα* literally means 'which you do not know', but that is not its sense. Knowledge by acquaintance has already been granted by Meno. He is not asking how one comes to know the thing. On the other hand, it does not make any sense to say 'How will you know that it is this what you did not know?'. Perhaps Meno should have said *... πῶς εἴσῃ τὸ τοῦτό ἐστιν ὃ σὰ οὐκ ᾔδῃσθα.*³ This, though, is ambiguous. It could mean that one does not have knowledge of what the

1. I think that Meno's use of *αὐτῷ* gives support to my suggestion that *τοῦτο* refers to the thing which is virtue. *Αὐτῷ* is here used as a pronoun.
2. "How will you know that it is this, which you do not know?"
3. "How will you know what this is, which you do not know?"

thing is, or it could mean that one does not have knowledge of the thing. To avoid this ambiguity, Meno need only have said '... πῶς εἶσθ' τὸ τοῦτό ἐστιν'.¹ If this had been said, the distinction would have been obvious.

The reason why Meno did not say what he should have might be that Plato said it for him. Some philosophers are like magicians and their theories like magic shows. By sleight-of-hand a magician makes an ordinary object disappear. Those who watch come to believe that the thing which was made to disappear was not real. But, if the object is given a proper viewing, it is seen as an ordinary object. At any rate, Meno is not responsible for the paradox.

It might be objected that I have put words into the mouth of Meno. Fair enough. My purpose is not to characterize Meno as a philosopher. What I wish to show is that Plato's theory of recollection presupposes that one can know what a thing is, because of past acquaintance with that thing.

Socrates states 'Meno's' paradox in the following way:

οὐκ ἄρα ἐστὶν ῥητεῖν ἀνθρώπῳ οὔτε ὃ οἶδε
οὔτε ὃ μὴ οἶδε; οὔτε γὰρ αὖ ὅ γε οἶδεν ῥητοῖ - οἶδεν

1. "How will you know what this is?"

γάρ, καὶ οὐδὲν δεῖ τῷ γε τοιούτῳ ζητήσεως - οὔτε ὃ
μὴ οἶδεν - οὐδέ γὰρ οἶδεν ὅτι ζητήσει. (80e2-5).

Since 'ζητοῖ' governs all the 'ὅ' clauses, we should understand a demonstrative pronoun in the governing clause. So, Socrates is saying "... it is not possible for a man to look for either that which he does know or that which he does not know. He cannot look for that which he knows, for he knows it; and in this case there is no need of a search. Nor can he look for that which he does not know, because he does not know that which he is looking for".

The paradox arises by confuting 'finding' and 'coming to know what a thing is'. One can be asked to look for something which is black, slim, etc., and on the basis of that description find something which is black, slim, etc. One does not have to know what a thing is to look for it. But, Plato generates the paradox by making 'knowing what a thing is' a condition of searching for it.

I grant that one has to know what a pen is before one can look for a pen, but this is not to admit the paradox. When I ask Jake to help me look for my pen, it is not enough for him to know what a pen is if he is to help me. As I have already pointed out, I shall have to give a description of my pen, and he shall have to find

a pen which fits the description. But, the point which is basic to my argument is that finding a thing which fits the description is not sufficient for finding out what the thing is.

Let us see what follows from the assumption that 'ἵζηται' means 'to ask about'. In the first place, I note that when one asks 'about', one asks about something. So, the problem we will be concerned with is this: Can one ask about something which one knows nothing? If all knowledge is knowledge by acquaintance, one cannot ask about something which one does not know. Before one can ask about something, one has to identify in some way the thing which one is asking about. In identifying the thing, one comes to know the thing.

If all knowledge were by acquaintance, questions like 'What is that which is on your desk?' would not be possible. But, we do ask such questions. Insofar as he who asks such a question is asking about something, he knows which thing he is asking about. He can point at, perhaps pick it up and take it with him, or he can give a description of it. I have characterized that knowledge which makes possible pointing, picking up, and describing as knowledge by acquaintance. I am, though, offering only a characterization.

Socrates proposes a solution to the paradox which he has stated. His solution is this:

Ἄτε οὖν ἡ ψυχὴ ἀθάνατός τε οὔσα καὶ πολλάκις
γεγονυῖα, καὶ ἑώρακυῖα καὶ τὰ ἐνθάδε καὶ τὰ
ἐν Ἅιδου καὶ πάντα χρήματα, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅτι
οὐ μεμάθηκεν. (81c).¹

It may very well be that the soul is immortal and has become acquainted with all things here and in Hades. But, this is not to the point. Meno can still ask "And how did the soul come to know in that other place what 'this' or 'that' is?". If this is not Meno's question, it should be ours.

Notice that the theory of recollection stands with one foot on the paradox. Socrates uses a poem of Pindar to illustrate three assumptions. The assumptions are that the soul is immortal, that the soul has beheld all things both here and in Hades, and that the soul is able to recollect all things. These three assumptions are consistent with the paradox. (One could not ask about that which one is acquainted with, because one is or has been acquainted with it; nor could one ask about that with which one is not acquainted, because one is not or has not been acquainted with it.) What does Socrates do? He introduces two gratuitous assumptions for which he does not even provide a poem as

1. The soul, since it is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen all things both here and in the other world, it has learned everything that is.

evidence. He further assumes that all nature is akin, and that by remembering one thing the soul can remember everything else.¹ Neither of these assumptions has any bearing on the question, "How does the soul come to know what a thing is?". On the other hand, given the latter of these two assumptions, Plato is obliged to state a reason for why the soul forgets most everything. In the Phaedo, Plato gives that reason. Apparently, the soul is² deranged, whenever it is lodged in a body.

The theory of recollection begs the issue in question. It presupposes that having acquaintance with a thing is sufficient for knowing what the thing is. And the assumption that the soul has forgotten everything is supposed to somehow save us from the absurd consequences of that presupposition. What is of importance is that the distinction which undercuts the paradox also undercuts the theory of recollection. We have distinguished 'knowing a thing' and 'knowing what the thing is', and we say that the first is different from and not sufficient for the second. Plato presupposes that the two are one and the same.

The paradox and the theory are both generated upon the presupposition that there is something which is

1. 81c-d

2. Phaedo, 64c-67b

what virtue is. If so, knowing that thing would entail knowing what virtue is. This is the basis of 'If one does not know the thing, one cannot look for it; and if one does know the thing, one does not need to look for it.' The theory of recollection is an attempt to avoid one of the consequences of the paradox by making learning into something which it is not; namely, remembering. But there is another way in which the consequence that one cannot learn anything can be avoided.

Consistent with the paradox is the presupposition that when one does not know a thing, say virtue, one does not know the thing to which the word 'virtue' refers. So, one could know the word, but not know the thing to which the word refers. I will investigate this presupposition by considering the question 'Can virtue be taught?'. I will not attempt to answer this question. I wish only to see what sort of question it is.

Chapter II

A discussion of the question

'Can virtue be taught?'

The question 'Can virtue be taught?' is one which a moral philosopher might have occasion to ask. *Prima facie*, there appears to be nothing wrong with the question. It is analogous to questions for which we do have answers; questions like 'Can geometry be taught?'. But who would ask "Can geometry be taught?". The answer to it is, after all, obvious. On the other hand, imagine Galileo asking himself "I wonder if Newtonian physics can be taught?". The example is revealing. Just as Galileo would not ask such a question, so also would not he who does not know what virtue is ask "Can virtue be taught?". Even though this question is analogous to others which might be asked about things which are taught, the analogy remains at the level of asking a question of the form 'Can x be taught?'. And any such question might very well be infelicitous.

The position which I will develop in this chapter is that anyone who knows what geometry is knows that it can be taught, and that anyone who does not know what geometry is will not ask "Can geometry be taught?". Of course, I wish to maintain this position with respect to whatever is taught.

Suppose that I ask another "Can you teach me geometry?". If he says "No", the matter ends there - who other than he knows better what he can do. What if he says "Yes"; how do I find out that he can really teach me geometry? Quite simply, I ask him to teach me geometry. I ask him "Will you teach me geometry?". He may accede to my request; he may not. If he does accede, he demonstrates not only that he can teach geometry but also that geometry can be taught. Could not one who wishes to learn virtue adopt this procedure? No; what underlies the procedure is the assumption that geometry can be taught.

Let us consider expressions of the forms 'Can you teach me x?' and 'Will you teach me x?' for the purpose of seeing what conditions of ordinary use obtain when an expression of either form is used. Once we have seen those conditions, we can decide whether any question of the form 'Can x be taught?' can have an ordinary use.

Whoever understands the question 'Can you teach me chess?' can answer it. The same holds for questions like 'Do you know Jake?' and 'Do you know the two-step?'. There is a different sort of question; for example 'Is there a post-office in this town?'. When a person asks whether 'so-and-so' is the case, he who answers must know whether 'so-and-so' is the case. On the other hand, a person who does not know the two-step can reply "I

don't know" to the question "Do you know the two-step?". The question 'Can virtue be taught?' belongs to the second kind.

An expression of the form 'Can you teach me x?' can be distinguished from an expression of the form 'Will you teach me x?'. An expression of the former kind is a question; an expression of the latter kind is a request.¹ Although any expression of either form is used to ask another something, a question is answered, while a request is complied with, satisfied, fulfilled, or denied. One can answer 'Can you teach me chess?' by saying either "Yes" or "No" - and in saying either one's response to the question is complete. When one says "No" to 'Will you teach me chess?', one does not answer but rather denies a request. Nor is saying "Yes" to a request an answer. Saying "Yes" only obliges one and does not fulfill the request. Beyond obliging oneself, there remains the doing of that which will satisfy the request.

There is another difference between questions and requests. He who puts a question does so, because he does not know the answer to his question and he wishes

1. The distinction does not so much turn on the forms of the expressions. 'Will you go to Banff next week?' could be a question, it could also be a request. On the other hand, to say "I can teach you chess" is not to say "I will teach you chess".

to know. He who answers a question will answer it either affirmatively or negatively, or by saying what¹ is the case, or by ruling the question out of order. The person who asks does not know what the answer to his question is. On the other hand, he who makes a request, prescribes the end which he is asking another to achieve. Suppose that I say to another "Will you do me a favor?". Before he can do me a favor, I have to specify what I would like him to do. And, ordinarily, one knows what one wishes the other to do.

Even though there are these differences between questions and requests, they share a similarity. He who wishes to ask a question will not ask another whom he believes does not know. He will ask someone who, as he believes, does know. Similarly with requests. He who wishes to have something done for him will ask another who, as he believes, can do that which he wishes to have done. Where the presupposition that the other knows is not present, the question is not put for the sake of finding something out. Similarly with requests.

The theory of recollection undercuts the possibility of any question. It also makes pointless requests like 'Will you teach me chess?'. That such requests are

1. To the question 'When did the meeting take place?' one might reply "It didn't. It was cancelled".

made and questions put is obvious. So, we should bring to the surface what has been submerged by the theory. Our predicament is not that we have to rescue what is secure everywhere except in Plato's study; rather we should set in his study those ordinary things which have hitherto been refused admittance. Let us consider those things which Meno's paradox does not touch. The paradox provides no reason for thinking that a request like 'Will you bring me a cup?' cannot be made.

When one makes a request, one asks another to do something for one. For example, I might ask Hilikka to bring me the copy of the Republic which is in the other room. There is another kind of example: suppose that I ask a repairman to fix the arm on my phonograph which does not pivot; I am able to tell whether he has fixed it, when I get back from his shop. There is a third kind of request: suppose that I ask a mechanic to put a jive-valve in my car even though I do not know what a jive-valve is, because he has told me that the car needs a jive-valve.

These three examples can be distinguished from one another. With the first, I know what will fulfill the request (namely, having a copy of the Republic placed before me), and I also know how the request is to be fulfilled (namely, by having it picked up and brought to me). Notice that requests like this one are sometimes

denied on the grounds that the person making the request knows how to do what he is asking the other to do. The second example is different with respect to knowing how the request is to be fulfilled. I can know whether the phonograph now operates properly, but I do not know how to repair it - the repairman, of course, knows both. With the third, I know neither that the request is satisfied, nor how it is satisfied. I could not have made this request, unless I had been told that my car needs a jive-valve. But, to be told that the car needs a jive-valve is not to be told what a jive-valve is. Now, which of these three would be like a 'Teach me' request?

If 'Teach me' requests are like other sorts of requests, one has to specify that which one wishes to learn when one asks to be taught something. But, one cannot know that which one wishes to learn, if one's request to be taught it is genuine. The person who asks to be taught geometry cannot know geometry, if the point of his request is to have another teach him geometry. Can both of these conditions be satisfied; can one specify that which one wishes to learn, and yet not know that which one wishes to learn? If the knowledge which is required for specifying that which one wishes to learn is the same as the knowledge which one acquires through being taught, all 'Teach me' requests are pointless. But more than pointless; it would never occur to

one to make such a request, unless one were told "There is a thing with which you are not acquainted".

An expression which is abit nonsensical can have the same form as an expression which does make sense. Consider,

(1) Will you teach me the fox-trot?

(2) Will you teach me the chair?

The first is a request which one could sensibly make; the point of making it would be for the sake of coming to know (i.e. learning) the fox-trot. With the second - although one can come to know chairs - it is not obvious that one's coming to know is made possible by another teaching one the chair. To rule out requests like the second, let me propose a test which 'Teach me' requests shall have to satisfy. If an expression - even though it be of the requisite form - cannot satisfy the test, it will not be a 'Teach me' request upon which another could act. The test is this: Any expression of the form 'Will you teach me x?' is a request, if and only if, it is possible to restate the expression as 'Will you teach me how x is done?'. It should be obvious that the second cannot satisfy the test; the chair is something which is, and not something which is done. By observing this as a condition which 'Teach me' requests must satisfy, we can see how one can specify that which one wishes to be taught without having to

know that which one is asking to be taught.

An expression of the form 'Will you teach me x?' is a 'Teach me' request, if it is like the request of the second example. Just as I can ask the repairman to do something which I do not know how to do, so the student can ask the teacher to teach him something he does not know how to do. And in each case, the person making the request can judge whether his request has been fulfilled. When one asks another to teach x, one can have knowledge of x, and can specify x, because 'x' refers to an activity or action. With an activity or action, the ability to specify does not entail the ability to do. One knows what the activity or action is; one does not know how to perform that activity or action. So, 'Teach me' requests are not for the sake of what one already knows, but for the sake of what one does not know how to do.

I do not intend that the argument provide a solution to the issue 'How is that knowledge which makes possible the specification of an object or action itself possible?'. This issue should be discussed in connection with questions of the form 'What is x?'. We are presently discussing what can be taught. Consistent with the conclusion of the preceding argument is the assumption that not all learning is made possible through teaching; that is, the knowledge which is required for making a

'Teach me' request does not come about through teaching.

Let us now take up, in a limited way, the relation between teaching and learning. We can consider the problem of whether the question 'Can virtue be taught?' can have an ordinary use.

I will argue that 'Can virtue be taught?' cannot have an ordinary use. The only two conditions which I have set for having an ordinary use are that he who asks a question does not know the answer to it, and that he who asks a question asks another whom he believes knows the answer. Only the first of these two conditions can be satisfied by the question 'Can virtue be taught?'.

One difference between 'Can virtue be taught?' and 'Can you teach me virtue?' is that the latter can be answered by anyone who understands the question. Replies to the latter could be not only 'Yes' and 'No' but also 'I do not know'. But 'I do not know' does not answer the former question. Or, in other words, a person's answer to the latter is based on his knowledge of what he can do, while a person answering the former has to be in a position to know whether it can be taught. Who would occupy such a position? Well, the teacher of virtue, if there is one, is in that position. But, if the questioner has to assume that the person whom he is asking is a teacher of virtue, the assumption on which the question rests makes the question pointless.

An objection might be made to this argument. The objection is that the questioner can be wrong in assuming that the person whom he has asked knows what he wishes to learn. The objection is not to the point. The questioner may be wrong, but his assumption is not unfounded. If his assumption is unfounded - that is, if he has no reason for thinking that the other knows - why should he ask the question? We need only pay attention to why we ask certain people to teach us, and not others. If one of us wishes to learn geometry, he will ask the geometrician. Or, if one of us wishes to learn archery, he will ask the archer. To find out who is a geometrician, or who is an archer, one need only to find a person who can do geometry or a person who can perform the skills of geometry. That is to say, one finds a person who can perform the activity one wishes to learn.

I have distinguished between learning what x is and learning how x is done. I say that only 'how x is done' can be taught. To see more exactly why this is so, we should consider the relation between 'teach' on the one hand, and 'show' and 'tell' on the other.

Any 'Teach me' request which admits of the form 'Will you teach me how x is done?' also admits of the form 'Will you show me how x is done?' and the form 'Will you tell me how x is done?'. But not all 'Show

me' and 'Tell me' requests admit of the form of 'Teach me' requests. Those which do not are requests to be shown an object or to be told about an object. We can here appeal to ordinary examples. Consider,

(1) Where did you learn that?

Depending upon what 'that' is a place-holder for, there are two kinds of answers. Suppose by 'that' is meant 'about Grandma's rocker'. One could answer,

(2) Jake told me.

Suppose by 'that' is meant 'how to do the two-step'. Now, one can learn how to do the two-step by being told how; so, (2) could be an appropriate answer. But one could also say,

(3) Jake taught me.

Now, (3) is not an appropriate answer to (1), if the question is about Grandma's rocker. The same holds for 'Show me'.

One can fit many other examples into this schema. Some, though, will want to resist this analysis. And if I may, I should like to anticipate their objection. They will wish to say that one can be taught what an x is. Their objection can be easily disarmed. All that needs to be said to them is "When one is taught what an x is, one is taught how to recognize an x ". This would accommodate the objections and keep the argument intact. But, the move is wrong. It opens the door to the Platonic

programme.

ταύτην τοίνυν με αὐτὴν δίδαξον τὴν
 ἰδέαν τίς ποτέ ἐστιν, ἵνα εἰς ἐκείνην
 αποβλέπων καὶ χρώμενος αὐτῇ παραδείγματι,
 ὃ μὲν ἂν τοιοῦτον ἦ ὧν ἂν ἦ σὺ ἢ ἄλλος
 τις πράττει φῶ ὅσιον εἶναι, ὃ δ' ἂν μὴ
 τοιοῦτον, μὴ φῶ. (Euthyphro, 6e3).¹

We can imagine Socrates saying to Theaetetus,
 "This morning as I walked to the Lyceum I over-heard
 two men talking about something which I have never heard
 spoken of or never seen before. They called it 'geo-
 metry'. Can you teach me what geometry is?". 'Teach
 me' requests of this sort are different from other sorts
 of requests. Before I can ask another to bring me a
 beer-mug, I have to know what a beer-mug is. And in
 knowing what a beer-mug is, I can also know whether the
 person whom I asked has fulfilled my request when he
 brings me whatever he brings me. But, he who asks to
 be taught what a jive-valve is cannot, before he has
 been taught, know what a jive-valve is. How, then, will
 he know whether his request has been fulfilled? Rather
 than think that there is something very profound about

1. Teach me this *ἰδέα* - what it is - so that by look-
 ing upon it and using it as a paradigm I can say that
 any action of yours or another person is holy, if the
 action is of this sort; or if it is not of this sort,
 I can say that it is not holy.

being taught what a thing is, we should become suspicious of any request which is of the form 'Will you teach me what an x is?'. For not all mechanics are honest, and not all will tell us truly about jive-valves.

There is another difficulty which attends 'Will you teach me what x is?' requests. Suppose that a student wishes to learn geometry, and so asks Theaetetus "Will you teach me geometry?". What if Theaetetus were to say "It is a good thing that you came to me; for I will teach you what geometry is. Geometry is the branch of mathematics which treats of space and its relations, especially as shown in the properties and measurements of points, lines, angles, surfaces, and solids."? Might not the student complain that there must be something wrong with Theaetetus' definition, because he has not come to know how to do geometry? But, a better definition is not what is required. If one asks to be taught how to do something, the teacher does not accommodate that request by giving a definition of that which the student wishes to learn. Indeed, the student must have that kind of knowledge in order to make the request.

This analysis of 'Can virtue be taught?' has turned on two points. I will now indicate how those two points are related. The first is that the question is infelicitous. By that I mean it does not have a use in ordinary conversation; it is not the sort of question

one would put to find out something. The reason for this is the second point. He who knows what virtue is also knows whether it can be taught. If it is something which is done, it can be taught; if it is something which is, it cannot be taught. One does not first have to find out what it is, and then find out whether it can be taught. And I take it that the same holds for whatever is taught.

I have, to a certain extent, already indicated what Plato's response to my argument would be. Plato would say that one is taught virtue by being shown that which is 'virtue bare and naked itself'. His position is that one is taught by being shown 'simpliciter', and that the things which one is shown are supremely precious objects. Plato develops this position by setting down certain conditions with which answers to questions of the form 'What is x?' are to be in accord. That is to say that Plato develops a method for answering questions of the form 'What is x?'. And so I talk of the methodology of 'What is x?' questions.

In the Meno, we find Socrates outlining a methodology which Meno is expected to satisfy. We find Socrates doing the same thing in the Euthyphro. But, the methodology which is given in the Euthyphro is, I say, different from the methodology which is given in the Meno. The difference is that the methodology of the Euthyphro is coherent, while the methodology of the Meno is incoherent.

Chapter III

The method for answering a 'What
is x?' question in the Meno

The theory of recollection presupposes that one knows what virtue is when one knows the thing which is virtue. The method which is put forth in the Meno rests on a similar presupposition; namely, that there is something which is what virtue is. If this were the case, there should have to be something which is virtue-itself. To say the least, whatever is an x-itself shall have to be a rather special, if not peculiar, sort of thing.

In this chapter, I will argue that in the Meno Plato sets forth two quite different models for 'What it is to be an x-itself'. The fact that these two models stand side by side indicates that Plato has not seen 'What it is to be an x-itself' in the Meno.

Meno, like a number of other figures in the early dialogues, is characterized as one who thinks that he knows. Whether or not Meno does know what virtue is will not here be at issue. At issue will be whether anyone could say what virtue is, if what one says satisfies the methodology of the Meno.

In answer to the question 'What is virtue?', Meno says that the virtue of a man is to manage the affairs of the city, the virtue of a woman is to manage

the house and obey her husband, and that in general there is a virtue for each activity and age.¹ Even though Socrates does not know anything about virtue, he complains that Meno has not answered the question. How can Socrates make such a complaint? Well, he expects Meno to give a certain kind of answer. He expects Meno to say what virtue is, rather than saying that there are virtues.

*Κὰν εἰ πολλαὶ καὶ παντοδαπαὶ ἀρεταὶ εἰσιν,
 ἔν γε τι εἶδος ταύτων ἅπασαι ἔχουσιν δι'
 ὃ εἰσὶν ἀρεταί, εἰς ὃ καλῶς που ἔχει
 ἀποβλέψαντα τὸν ἀποκρινόμενον τῷ ἐρωτή-
 σαντι ἐκεῖνο δηλώσας, ὃ τυχάνει οὕσα
 ἀρετῇ. (726b).*

In this passage the conflation of 'Which thing is x?' and 'What is x?' occurs in two ways. When Socrates says "εἰς ὃ καλῶς που ἔχει ἀποβλέψαντα τὸν ἀποκρινόμενον τῷ ἐρωτήσαντι ἐκεῖνο δηλώσαι",³ he means that there is something upon which he who answers the question should keep his eye. But this metaphor of 'ἀποβλέψαντα'⁴ is held in place by a more basic conflation.

1. 71d-e

2. Even if virtues are many and various, they all have some one *εἶδος* because of which they are virtues, upon which he who answers to the questioner ought to keep his eye to make obvious that which virtue happens to be.

3. "...upon which he who answers to the question ought to keep his eye to make obvious that which virtue happens to be."

4. "keeping one's eye (on)"

Socrates is saying that there is some one *εἶδος* which all virtues have, and because of which all virtues are virtues. So besides there being something which is what virtue is, that thing is also possessed by all virtues (that is, possessed by the instances of virtue). Or, in other words, virtues are what they are because of something else which they possess.

What Socrates has said seems to be lost on Meno. So, Socrates gives a few examples.

Πότερον δὲ περὶ ἀρετῆς μόνον σοι οὕτω δοκεῖ, ὡς Μένων, ἄλλη μὲν ἀνδρὸς εἶναι, ἄλλη δὲ γυναικὸς καὶ τῶν ἄλλων, ἢ καὶ περὶ ὑγείας καὶ περὶ μεγέθους καὶ περὶ ἰσχύος ὡσαύτως; ἄλλη μὲν ἀνδρὸς δοκεῖ σοι εἶναι ὑγίεια, ἄλλη δὲ γυναικός; ἢ ταῦτόν πανταχοῦ εἶδος ἐστίν... (72d4).¹

If someone were to say 'I am as healthy as Jake's horse', we would understand what he meant. But what if he were to say 'I and Jake's horse have the same health'? What I am getting at is this: How are we to understand the inference 'Health is the same *εἶδος* everywhere'?

Plato needs a philosophical assumption to get 'ὑγεία', 'μεγέθος', and 'ἰσχύς'² to where he wants

1. Does it seem to you Meno that it is so only in relation to virtues, that there is one virtue for a man, another for a woman and others for the rest? Is it so in relation to health, size, and strength? Does it seem to you that there is one health for a man, and another for a woman, or is health the same everywhere...
2. 'Health', 'size', and 'strength'.

them. The assumption is that the *εἶδος* - being that which other things are - makes the other things what they are. When Socrates says "*εἴνπερ ἰσχυρὰ γυνὴ ἢ, τῷ αὐτῷ¹ εἶδει καὶ τῇ αὐτῇ ἰσχύϊ ἰσχυρὰ ἔσται;*" (72e4-5), he means that the thing which is strength is that which makes a person strong. But from this assumption emerges a different model for 'What it is to be an x-itself'.

Upon the 'that which is common' model justice and temperance, for example, are virtues, because they have the same *εἶδος*. But upon this second model justice and temperance are virtues because they have an *εἶδος* which makes them virtues. Now, the difference might seem slight, and it might be objected that the *εἶδος* of justice and temperance makes them virtues, because it is common to them. This objection is well taken. But let us look to the evidence on each side of the issue.

Consider first the evidence for the 'that which is common' model. There are three passages to which we should look: 72c1-2, 73c9-d2, and 74a6-10.

The first passage is: *τοῦτο τοίνυν μοι αὐτὸ εἶπέ,...*
*ὃ οὐδὲν διαφέρεισιν ἀλλὰ ταῦτόν εἰσιν ἅπαντα...*²

1. If a woman is strong, she will be strong by the same *εἶδος* and the same strength.
2. "Tell me this (thing) itself...by which none of them differ but are all the same." (At 72c1, Socrates is talking about the *οὐσία* of bees. This is of no consequence, because he has drawn an analogy between bees and virtues.)

Socrates cannot mean that two things are the same in virtue of having a characteristic by which they do not differ. A brown chair and a brown desk have the same color, but they are not the same. There are two levels at which this inference from they have the same color to they are the same is false. First, it would be false to allow that the brown chair and brown desk are one and the same thing. Second, it would be false to allow that the chair and desk are of the same kind. There is, though, a third level at which the inference might be allowed. An example of such an inference is "These two cars are Chevrolets. Hence, they are the same". So, let us presume that Socrates wishes to know the distinguishing mark because of which different things are of the same kind. There is, though, one more point. The inference pattern is from 'They have the same εἶδος' to 'They are the same'. This is stated quite clearly at 72c6-8.

The second passage is,

ΜΕΝ. Τί ἄλλο γ' ἢ ἄρχειν οἰόν τ' εἶναι τῶν
 ἀνθρώπων; εἵπερ ἔν γέ τι ᾗ τέτις κατὰ πάντων
 ΣΩ. Ἀλλὰ μὴν ᾗ τέτις γε.¹

1. Meno: What other than the capacity to rule men is virtue? If you are looking for some one thing amongst all of them (i.e. virtues).
 Socrates: Indeed I am looking for (that)

Now Socrates is not looking for the answer which Meno here gives, because he goes on to reject what Meno says. Rather he is looking for a certain kind of answer; an answer which would state that which is the same in all virtues. The same point emerges from the third passage.

*πολλὰς αὖ γάρ ἤκαμεν ἀρετὰς μίαν ἰητοῦντες,
ἄλλον τρόπον ἢ νυνδὴ· τὴν δὲ μίαν, ἣ δὲ
πάντων τούτων ἐστίν, οὐ δύναμεθα ἀνευρεῖν*

'Διὰ', when it takes a genitive completion, expresses the notion of 'being through completely'. So, Socrates is saying "We have found again many virtues when we were looking for one. The one which is through all of them, we are not able to find."

The evidence for the 'that which makes a thing what it is' model is not very weighty. In fact, the evidence is susceptible to an interpretation that would discount it as evidence. At any rate, the examples which Socrates gives at 72d might rest not on the notion that a thing is what it is because of a characteristic which it shares with other things, but on the notion that a thing is what it is because of something which makes it so. For example, the thing which is health makes a person healthy; or, the thing which is strength makes him strong. Now the interpretation which undercuts this evidence is this: Health is that which makes a person healthy, because health is that characteristic which is

common to people who are healthy. This interpretation of these examples can be substantiated.

From 72d to 73a Meno is both puzzled and unconvinced. At 73a Socrates introduces a different argument; an argument which is similar to ones found in other dialogues. What follows from the argument substantiates the interpretation of the examples. Socrates begins the argument by asking Meno,

*οἶόν τε εἴ τι διοικεῖν ἢ πόλιν ἢ οἰκίαν ἢ ἄλλο ὅτι-
οὔν μὴ σωφρόνως καὶ δίκαιως διοικουῦνται; (73a8).¹*

What is the point of the question? Well, Meno has already said that 'διοικεῖν πόλιν'² and 'διοικεῖν οἰκίαν'³ are virtues. So, the question can be restated

as: Is one virtuous when one manages the affairs of the city or house well, if one is not temperate and just?

In the Laches Socrates asks 'Can the foolish man be brave,⁴ or does it belong only to those who are wise to be brave?'.⁴

And in the Protagoras he asks,

*σοφία καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἀνδρεία καὶ
δικαιοσύνη καὶ ὁσιότης, πότερον ταῦτα, πέντε
ὄντα ὀνόματα, ἐπὶ ἐνὶ πράγματι ἐστίν...
(349b1).⁵*

I take the point of these three questions to be the

1. ...is it possible to manage well a city or house, or anything else whatsoever, if one does not manage temperately and justly?
2. 'to manage a city'
3. 'to manage a house'
4. Laches, 192a-193d
5. Are wisdom, temperance, courage, justice, and piety five names for one thing...

same: Can a man be wise, if he is not good?; or Can a man be just, but not good?. In general Socrates is asking whether a man can possess a particular virtue, if he is not good.

Assume that a man cannot possess a particular virtue, unless he is good. From this it follows that whoever is good is wise, temperate, brave, and pious. But in the Meno Socrates puts it this way:

τῶν αὐτῶν ἄρα ἀμφοτέροι δέονται, εἴπερ μέλλουσιν ἀγαθοὶ εἶναι, καὶ ἡ γυνή καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ, δικαιοσύνης καὶ σωφροσύνης. (73b3).¹

What is said in the Protagoras entails that the virtues are dependent upon some one *εἶδος*, whereas what is said in the Meno entails that being good is dependent on the virtues. This conforms to the interpretation of the health, size, and strength examples. That is to say that 'Good' makes people good, because it is common to those who are just, temperate, etc.

But now, on the other hand it might be objected that since virtues are virtues because of that which they share, it follows that virtues are dependent upon some one *εἶδος*. And moreover, it would appear that this consequence is needed for the conclusion which

1. Both man and woman, if they are to be good, must be just and temperate.

Plato wishes to draw: *Πάντες ἄρ' ἀνθρώποι τῷ αὐτῷ
τρόπῳ ἀγαθοί εἰσιν.*¹ (73c1) That is to say all who
are good are good because of some one *εἶδος*. Thus, we
are faced with this problem: Either those who are good
are good because they are wise, temperate, etc., or
those who are wise, temperate, etc. are so because they
are good.

Since we have textual evidence on both sides of
the issue, we should dismantle the machinery which has
made this dilemma possible. I think that the dilemma
arises from the 'that which is common' model.

Meno finally comes to see what Socrates wants: *ἔν γέ
τι ζητεῖς κατὰ πάντων.* (73d1) ("You are look-
ing for some one (thing) amongst all of them". or "You
are asking about some one thing amongst all of them.")
It has generally been supposed that were Meno to say
something which satisfies this condition, he would be
giving a definition. The supposition is too generous.
Whoever finds this one thing will not also find what the
thing is; nor will he find that which is what other things
are when he finds that which is amongst all of them. And
for this reason: one is not good because one possesses
all the virtues; rather one possesses all the virtues be-
cause one is good. My point is that the 'that which is

1. All men are good in the same way.

common' model of definition is incoherent.

Let us suppose that justice is what it is because of the *εἶδος* it shares with other virtues. So, to say what justice is is to say to which set of things it belongs. ('Things' is not here out of place. In the Protagoras, Socrates says "*ἡ δικαιοσύνη πρᾶγμα τί ἐστίν*" - "Justice is a thing".)¹ Since the *εἶδος* is that which is amongst all of them, it will be that which² defines the class of virtues.

It is to be presumed that the *εἶδος* which defines the class of virtues is unique to virtues. If we are asked about this presumption, we shall have to say that it is 'a priori'. For if there were a characteristic which is common to virtues and tomatoes, we should have to say that virtues and tomatoes are of the same class. But what if there were a characteristic which in fact is common and unique to virtues and tomatoes? If so, we could have either virtues or tomatoes, but not both.

Socrates has already said as much as this: *ἐν γέ τι εἶδος ταῦτόν ἅπασαι ἔχουσιν δι' ὃ εἰσιν ἀρεταί...*³

There is another problem with this model.

1. Protagoras, 330c1-2
2. Robinson points out that the verb which Plato uses for 'to define' - *ὀρίσκειν* - "...never losing the feel of its original connexion with boundary-stones, suggests laying down a mark to distinguish a fold from the next, without in any way describing the soils or crops in the fields so delimited." Plato's Earlier Dialectic, p.55.
3. All virtues have some one *εἶδος* because of which they are virtues.... See p. 34, n.2.

This model of definitions fails where it should, of all places, succeed. One cannot say what an *eîdos* is. If an *eîdos* belongs to a class, we shall have to define it not as itself but as something else; that is, if virtue-itself is defineable, it is not to be defined as virtue-itself. For justice is, upon this model, said to be a virtue. But there is yet a more basic problem with the 'common *eîdos*' model of definition. When one 'points out' that which is common to virtues, one does not necessarily point out that which is virtue-itself.

Let us assume that when Socrates asks Meno 'What is virtue?', he expects Meno to state the distinguishing mark in virtue of which one could recognize a virtue to be a virtue. And let us say that this distinguishing mark is a 'criterion'. But, let us suppose that the subject of inquiry is not something as important as virtue, and instead is about the characteristic which is common to chairs. The question which the investigation will attempt to answer is 'What is that in virtue of which no chair differs from any other chair, and because of which all chairs are the same?'. .

How is this investigation to get under way? Allow that he who is attempting to answer this question can scrutinize first 'this' chair, and then 'that' chair, and so on. But now what else is needed so that this investigation can be successful? Recall that this model

of definition requires the presumption that there is a characteristic which is unique to the members of a particular class. So allow also that there is a characteristic which belongs only to chairs and that nothing is a chair which does not have this characteristic. For the sake of simplicity, let us suppose that the characteristic which is unique to chairs is 'being red'. Thus our investigator into the nature of chairs will upon completion of his investigation say 'All chairs are red'.

The first point which can be made about this investigation is that it requires, for its success, that all instances of the sort of thing for which a distinguishing mark is to be stated be inspected. The second point is that one does not say that a thing is a chair when one says that it is red. Rather saying that it is red justifies one in saying also that it is a chair; or, anything which possesses the characteristic 'red' is to be admitted into the class of chairs.

Consider now the search for virtue. Socrates admits that justice and temperance are virtues. Would he say that there are more virtues? In the Protagoras, he¹ says that there are five. Let us presume that his list is complete, and pass on to the second point. When one says that a thing has the characteristic (say 'y') which

1. Protagoras, 349b

is common to all virtues, one does not say that the thing which has this characteristic is a virtue. Rather saying that it has 'y' justifies one in saying also that it is a virtue; one can admit that which has 'y' into the class of virtues.

From the first point it follows that the attempt to state a criterion is useless. The criterion is useless, because before one can state the criterion one must have made a complete inspection of all the instances of the sort of thing for which one wants a criterion. What this means is that one will already have said of those things the very same 'saying' that the criterion is to justify; namely, that these are chairs, or that these are virtues. But, if the attempt to state the criterion is not useless, it is hopeless. There is no possibility of success. Suppose, like before, that a criterion of being a chair is wanted. Given the requirement of complete inspection, we must acknowledge those things which are chairs as chairs in order to state the criterion. But, since the criterion is supposed to justify one in saying that a certain thing is a chair, then the attempt to state the criterion cannot even begin. There is nothing about which we could say 'It is a chair' and be justified in saying that. I submit to you that this is exactly what Socratic aporia is.

Socratic aporia may have come about through divine

inspiration, but it is sustained by a philosophical method; a method which is really quite disastrous. Those questions which Socrates most wants answered, cannot be answered.

Even if something common is found, we can still ask 'What is the logical connection between 'having the characteristic y' and 'being of the class of virtues'?'. Only if the characteristic 'y' is virtue-itself, can there be a logical connection. But what is said in the Meno does not make this clear. Indeed, there is only one place in the Meno where Plato's term for 'x-itself' (*ἀρετὴ αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό*) occurs; at 100b. But, the occurrence of the term *ἀρετὴ αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό* does not warrant the conclusion that Plato believes that the characteristic 'y' is virtue-itself. When writing the Meno, Plato may have thought that the characteristic 'y' is virtue-itself, because it is common to those things which are virtues. But, this is incoherent. Meno may find for Socrates a characteristic which is common to all virtues, but the search is possible only on the condition that Meno knows the things which are virtues. Without such knowledge, all he can do is classify something according to 'this' or 'that' characteristic; that is, no one could ever find for Socrates *ἀρετὴ αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό*.

Plato's methodology can be saved, if the model

upon which it rests is turned around. Instead of the characteristic 'y' being virtue-itself because it is common to the many virtues, the many virtues will be of the same class because of virtue-itself. Or, in other words, virtue-itself is not essential to the many because it is common; rather virtue-itself is common because it is essential. This is the point of a question which Plato has Socrates put in the Euthyphro:

ἄρα τὸ ὅσιον ὅτι ὁσιόν ἐστιν φιλεῖται ἀπὸ τῶν θεῶν, ἢ ὅτι φιλεῖται ὅσιον ἐστιν; (10a2).¹

1. Is the holy loved by the gods, because it is holy;
or is it holy, because it is loved;

Chapter IV

The method for answering a 'What is x?' question in the Euthyphro

The dramatic setting of the Euthyphro is familiar enough. Socrates and Euthyphro meet at the court-house; a place which Socrates is not wont to visit. Socrates is there, because he has had a charge of impiety brought against him. Euthyphro is there, because he is bringing a charge of murder against his father who caused the death of a servant. Of course, only he who really knows what piety is would be justified in bringing a charge against his father.

Σὺ δὲ δὴ πρὸς Διός, ὦ Εὐθύφρων, οὕτωςι ἀκριβῶς οἶεῖς ἐπίστασθαι περὶ τῶν θείων ὅπῃ ἔχει, καὶ τῶν ὁσίων τε καὶ ἀνοσίων, ὥστε τοούτων οὕτω πραχθέντων ὡς σὺ λέγεις, οὐ φοβῇ δικάζόμενος τῷ πατρὶ ὅπως μὴ αὖ σὺ ἀνόσιον πρᾶγμα τηχάνῃς πράττων;
(4e3).¹

This nicely accommodates the ensuing 'conversation'.

Plato would have us believe that the reason behind the conversation is that Socrates wishes Euthyphro to teach

1. Good heavens Euthyphro, do you think that your knowledge of things divine, both holy and unholy, is so precise that even if things have been done as you say (i.e., even if your father caused the death of the servant) you are not afraid lest by prosecuting your father you might happen to do something unholy.

him what piety is. All that needs to be said about the dramatic setting has now been said.

The dialectic begins at 5c. Socrates asks a 'What is x?' question, and as in the Meno also asks to be given a certain kind of answer.

Ποῖόν τι τὸ εὐσεβές φης εἶναι καὶ τὸ
ἀσεβές καὶ περὶ φύου καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων; ἢ
οὐ ταῦτόν ἐστιν ἐν πάσῃ πράξει τὸ ὅσιον
αὐτὸ αὐτῷ, καὶ τὸ ἀνόσιον αὐτῷ τοῦ μὲν ὀσίου
παντὸς ἐναντίον, αὐτὸ δὲ αὐτῷ ὁμοῖον καὶ
ἔχον μίαν τινα ἰδέαν κατὰ τὴν ἀνοσιότητα
πάν ὅτι περ ἂν μέλλῃ ἀνόσιον εἶναι

There are here two questions. The first looks like an

1. The structure of the second question is somewhat complex, and so I will give an analysis of it before I translate it.

The difficulty arises in connection with the last part of the question (... ἔχον μίαν τινα ἰδέαν κατὰ τὴν ἀνοσιότητα πάν ὅτι περ ἂν μέλλῃ ἀνόσιον εἶναι). The problem is whether 'πάν' is in apposition to 'αὐτό' (at d3) which in turn, refers to 'τὸ ἀνόσιον', or whether 'πάν' refers to something other than 'τὸ ἀνόσιον'.

I think that 'πάν' refers to something other than 'τὸ ἀνόσιον'. It seems to me that the first three parts of the question fit together quite nicely, while the last part introduces a new notion.

The first part makes sense on its own. But, with the introduction of the second, the third part of the question is required. In the first is introduced the notion that piety is the same with itself. In the next part, impiety is said to be the opposite of anything pious. In the third, impiety is given the same status as piety; namely, it too is the same with itself.

But in one way this analysis of the first three parts is too neat. There is a notion which is left dangling in the second part. Impiety is not said to be the opposite of piety, but rather is said to be the opposite of anything pious. So, three things are referred to: piety, anything pious, and impiety

ordinary question, but is not. The second is clearly a philosophical question.

If Socrates were asking 'What are the pious and the impious?', he would be asking a familiar sort of question. So, why should he add '*περὶ φόβου καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων*'?¹ What would we make of the question 'What do you say a chair to be both in relation to sitting and other things?'. If this latter question is odd, so also should Socrates' first question be odd. There is, though, a point to his question.

I suggest that this first question is an 'inexact' way of formulating the second question. The phrase

... If piety and anything pious are one and the same, then I am wrong about the fourth part. But the two are not the same, nor does Plato take them to be the same. At 6d10-11 and again at 6d11-e1, Plato distinguishes between piety and the things which are pious. In the first, Plato says that there is an *εἶδος* which makes pious things pious. In the second, he says that an *ἰδέα* makes them pious. I say that the *εἶδος* (or *ἰδέα*) is piety-itself.

If the *εἶδος* of piety is different from piety-itself, then that which makes pious things pious is not piety-itself. This consequence would undermine the purpose of the Euthyphro. (Of course, this conclusion rests on my interpretation of the Euthyphro.) At any rate, the fourth part of the second question presupposes a distinction between piety-itself and anything pious.

My translation of 5c9-e5 is this: ...what would you say the pious and the impious to be both in relation to murder and other things? Or, is piety-itself the same with itself in all actions, and is impiety, on the other hand, the opposite of anything pious, and is impiety-itself the same with itself, and does anything which is likely (literally, 'destined') to be unholy have some one *ἰδέα* in respect of its unholiness.

1. 'In relation to murder and other things'.

'έν πάσῃ πράξει'¹ indicates what Socrates means by 'περὶ φύου καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων'. I further suggest that the first is meant to be something like an ordinary question. 'ποῶν τι'² does give to the first a semblance of being ordinary. But, the occurrence of 'περὶ φύου καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων' shows that it is engendered by philosophical intentions; the ordinary 'ποῶν τι' does not serve Plato's purposes.

The second question is already a full-fledged philosophical question. Socrates is asking "Do you not say that the holy itself is the same with itself in all actions, and that the unholy is the opposite of anything holy, and also is the same with itself (in any action), and anything unholy has some one *εἶδος*³ which it must have to be unholy?". This question brings in four very important notions: 'being the same with itself'; 'being in all actions (of a certain kind)'; 'the *εἶδος* which a thing must have to be holy (or unholy)'; and 'the unholy is the opposite of anything holy'. The first three of these have importance in the Euthyphro; the fourth is not influential in the Euthyphro, but is central to Plato's later work.

1. 'In all actions'.

2. An interrogative locution - what?

3. I assume that the *εἶδος* and *ἰδέα* of piety are one and the same thing. Given what Plato says, the assumption seems quite reasonable.

The methodology outlined here is similar to the methodology of the Meno in only one way: "*οὐ μανθάνεις ὅτι ζητῶ τὸ ἐπὶ πάνιν τοῦτοις ταύτου*" (75a4).

(Do you not understand that I am looking for (or asking about) the thing which is the same to all of them.) This is the notion of 'being in all actions of a certain kind'. But, Socrates is not, in the Meno, saying that the thing which is the same to all things of a certain class is that which all things of the class must have to be of that class.

Meno is asked to say what that is because of which all virtues are the same. Euthyphro, on the other hand, is asked to say what is the same with itself in all pious actions. We have already an interpretation for this: In the Euthyphro, the characteristic 'y' is assumed to be piety-itself.

There is another difference between the Meno and the Euthyphro. In the Meno, it is said that a virtue is a virtue because of that which it shares with other virtues. But in the Euthyphro, the notion of 'being common to many' is crowded out. A thing must have the *εἶδος* of piety before it can be pious. (So also with impiety and the impious.) The formula "*ἔχου μίαν τιναῖ ἰδέαν κατὰ ἀνοσιότητα πάν*"¹ is quite different from the

1. Anything which is likely to be unholy has some one *ἰδέα* in respect of its unholiness.

formula 'that which is common to the many'.

It might be objected that the notion of 'being the same in all actions of a certain kind' entails the first and third notions. This objection cannot be sustained. A characteristic can be common to things which are not of the same class. But more important is that one has to know which things belong to a particular class before one can find a characteristic which is common to those members of that class.

Socrates develops four arguments. These arguments run alongside one another from 6a to 9c. At 9d, the fourth emerges on its own. The conclusion of the fourth is whatever is pious is pious because of piety-itself. This is stated at 11b. (In speaking of the first as an argument, I speak somewhat loosely; I hope that you will allow me to do so.)

Euthyphro enthusiastically endorses Socrates' question (*Πάντως δήπου, ὦ Σώκρατες*).¹ So, Socrates asks him to say what piety and impiety are. Euthyphro's reply is somewhat confused. On the one hand, he might be saying that his action is a paradigm case of a pious action; he says "*τὸ ... ὅσιόν ἐστιν ὅπερ ἐγὼ νῦν ποίω*".²(5d8) Why would his action be a paradigm case? -

1. Yes, Socrates.

2. Piety is what I now do.

because it is like another action. (... ὁμολογοῦσι¹
(ἄνθρωποι Δία) τὸν αὐτοῦ πατέρα δῆσαι - 6a1 .)

It may be true that Euthyphro's and Zeus' actions are like one another, but this would not be a reason why both actions are pious. On the other hand, Euthyphro might be saying that his action is pious, because it is like an action which has been acknowledged as a paradigm case of pious actions.

αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἱ ἄνθρωποι ταχάνουσι νομίζοντες τὸν Δία θεῶν ἄριστον καὶ δίκαιοτατον, καὶ τοῦτον ὁμολογοῦσι τὸν αὐτοῦ πατέρα δῆσαι... (5e5).²

But, whichever way we understand Euthyphro's reply, it does not matter. In the first place, Socrates could say 'Even if all men think that your action is pious, or that it is pious because it is like a pious action of Zeus, why is either action really pious?'. Socrates, though, does not raise this question until 9c. In the second place, Socrates could reject what Euthyphro has said, because it does not qualify as the kind of answer which he agreed to give. Socrates makes this latter move first.

Before Socrates states the first argument, he

1. Men agree that Zeus punished his father.
2. Men happen to think that Zeus is the best and most just of the gods, and they agree that he punished his father.

gets Euthyphro to admit an assumption which is taken up as a premise in the second argument. He asks Euthyphro,

πόλεμον ἄρα ἡχῇ σὰ εἶναι τῷ ὄντι ἐν τοῖς
θεοῖς πρὸς ἀλλήλους, καὶ ἔχθρας γε δεινὰς
καὶ μάχας καὶ ἄλλα τοιαῦτα πολλά... (6b7).¹

Euthyphro says that he believes not only this but many other things about the gods which Socrates would be amazed to hear. Socrates gracefully deigns not to hear about these other things and gets on with the first argument.

The first is not much of an argument. Socrates simply says 'You (Euthyphro) said you would tell me what piety and impiety are, but you have not'. What is of interest is what Socrates says to remind Euthyphro of his obligation.

Μέμνησαι οὖν ὅτι οὐ τοῦτό σοι διεκελευόμην,
εἴ τι ἢ δύο με διδάξαι τῶν πολλῶν ὁσίων,
ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνο αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος ᾧ πάντα τὰ ὅσια ὁσιά
ἐστίν; ἔθυσθα γάρ που μὲν ἰδέα τὰ τε ἁνόσια
ἁνόσια εἶναι καὶ τὰ ὅσια ὅσια. (6d9).²

Let me point out how this statement makes precise what is ambivalent in the Meno. "Ἐν γέ τι εἶδος ταύτου

1. Do you believe that there really is warring among the gods, and that there are hatreds and fearful battles between them, and other such things...
2. Remember that I asked you not to teach me some one or two of the many pious things, but that **εἶδος** itself by which all things holy are holy. You said that the unholy things are unholy because of one **ἰδέα** and that the holy things are holy because of one **ἰδέα**.

ἅπασαι ἔχουσι δι' ὃ εἰσιν ἀρεταί" ¹ could mean either that virtues are virtues because they all have the same εἶδος, or that the εἶδος is that which makes them what they are. The latter is expressed in two ways in the above statement: "... (το) εἶδος, ᾧ πάντα τὰ ὅσια ὅσιά ἐστιν" ² and "... μιᾷ ἰδέᾳ τὰ τε ἀνόσια ἀνόσια εἶναι καὶ τὰ ὅσια ὅσια". ³

Socrates goes on to say something else, which is both of interest and importance.

Ταύτην τοίνυν με αὐτὴν δίδαξον τὴν ἰδέαν τίς ποτέ ἐστιν, ἵνα εἰς ἐκείνην ἀποβλέπων καὶ χρώμενος αὐτῇ παραδείγματι, ὃ μὲν ἂν τοιοῦτον ᾦ ὡς ἂν ᾦ σὺ ἢ ἄλλος τις πράττη φῶ ὅσιον εἶναι, ὃ δ' ἂν μὴ τοιοῦτον, μὴ φῶ. (6e3). ⁴

As in the Meno, the 'keeping one's eye on the εἶδος' metaphor is used. We have already noted that this metaphor is of use, only if the 'What is x?' question can be reduced to 'Which thing is x?'.

The four notions found at 5c re-emerge here at 6d-e. The phrase "ἐκείνος αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος, ᾧ πάντα

1. All virtues have some one εἶδος because of which they are virtues.
2. "...the εἶδος by which all things holy are holy"
3. "...the unholy things are unholy because of one ἰδέα"
4. So, teach me this ἰδέα - what it is - so that by looking upon it and using it as a paradigm I can say that any action of yours or another is holy, if it is of this kind; or if it is not, I can say that it is not holy.

τὰ ὅσια ὅσιά ἐστιν " ¹ expresses two of them: 'being the same with itself' and 'that which a thing must have to be holy'. As we will see, the latter of these presupposes that the 'αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος' ² is logically independent of those things which it defines - but now it more than defines, for it 'makes' them what they are.

The other two notions are 'being in all actions' and 'the unholy is the opposite of anything holy'. The first of these is expressed by 'χρώμενος αὐτῇ παραδείγματι' ³. Socrates is saying that the εἶδος can be used as a paradigm. This presupposes the notion of 'being in all (holy) actions'.

There would seem to be little difficulty in establishing the parallel between 5c and 6e in regard to the last notion. But, what Socrates says at 6e is quite different. At 5c, all he wishes to say is that the holy is the opposite of the unholy. The grammar of 6e indicates that Socrates is talking not about the holy and the unholy, but rather the holy and not holy. (ὁ μὲν ἂν τοιοῦτον, ἢ... ὅω ὅσιον εἶναι, ὁ δ' ἂν μὴ τοιοῦτον μὴ ὅω ⁴.) The fourth notion is expressed by the

1. "that εἶδος itself by which all things holy are holy"
2. "the εἶδος itself"
3. "by using it as a paradigm"
4. "I can say that it is holy, if it is of this kind; and if it is not, I can say that it is not holy."

above, only if whatever is not holy is unholy. We find Socrates assuming that whatever is not holy is unholy in the third argument.

Both the second and third arguments turn on Euthyphro's beliefs about the gods and his definition of piety. Quite simply, his beliefs and definition are inconsistent. The second argument brings out this inconsistency. The third assumes that the gods do quarrel, and its purpose is to introduce assumptions which explain why gods would quarrel (if they do quarrel).

It can hardly be obvious that Euthyphro has understood what Socrates wants, but he gives as a definition of whatever is pious anyway: *"ἔστι τοίνυν τὸ μὲν τοῖς θεοῖς προσφιλὲς ὅσιον, τὸ δὲ μὴ προσφιλὲς ἀνόσιον"*¹ (6e10). Since Euthyphro has already admitted that he believes that the gods have warred with one another, fought battles amongst themselves, and nurtured fearful enmeties, Socrates could say 'Well, doesn't it seem to you that what is dear to one of the gods is likely to be hated by another?'. But, Socrates does not say this right away. He first wants to show that if the gods quarrel they quarrel about the just and the unjust, the good and the bad. This leads to the third argument.

1. "The holy is loved by the gods, while the unholy is not loved."

At 7b6, Socrates asks "Ἐχθραν δὲ καὶ ὀργάς,
ὣ ἀριστερῶς, ἢ περὶ τίνων διαφορά ποιεῖ".¹

Socrates then goes on to give examples of the kind of disagreement which would not lead to anger and hatred. He says that a disagreement about which of two numbers is larger can be settled by calculation; that a disagreement about which of two things is larger can be settled by measuring; and that a disagreement about which of two things is heavier can be settled by measuring. The point of these examples is not made clear, but is obvious. Plato would have us believe that the reason we can settle disagreements of this kind is that we have standards by means of which we can judge. One cannot really dispute the examples, but one can dispute what Plato would have us believe a standard is.

Remember that Socrates wishes to use the *εἶδος*² as a standard or paradigm (*αὐτῇ παραδείγματι*). If there were an *εἶδος* of piety, one would have that knowledge which is necessary for knowing whether a thing is pious when one knows that thing which is the *εἶδος* of piety.

Plato has Socrates argue that those disagreements which cannot be settled are those disagreements about

1. "What kind of disagreement leads to anger and hatred?"

2. 'as a paradigm'

the just and the unjust, and the good and the bad.¹

The reason for this is not given, but is in the offing.

It is that knowledge of the *εἶδος* is lacking. Socrates is not saying that disagreements about the good and the bad occur because they are about the good and the bad, but because the knowledge needed to settle such disagreements is lacking. The point of Socrates' argument is this: Since we do not have knowledge of the *εἶδος* of the good, we will disagree about whether a thing is good.

The third argument employs two other assumptions:² disagreements which cannot be settled lead to quarrels; and one loves those things which one believes to be good,³ and hates those things which one believes to be bad. A conclusion could here be drawn. Disagreements are about what one person believes to be good and another thinks not to be good. (And also that the one loves what the other does not.)

Socrates draws a conclusion which is different from the one which has just been drawn. He says "*Ταῦτ', ἄρα, ὡς ἔοικεν, μισεῖται τε ἀπὸ τῶν θεῶν καὶ φιλεῖται, καὶ θεομισῇ τε καὶ θεοφιλεῖται ταῦτ' ἂν εἴη*".⁴ (8a4)

1. 7d

2. 7e

3. 7e

4. "The same things, it seems, would be both hated by the gods and loved by the gods, and that which is loved by the gods would be hated."

There is a suppressed premise. It is 'Whatever is not loved is hated'. This establishes a parallel between the passages at 5c and 6d-e in relation to the fourth notion.

I have distinguished between the second and third arguments even though the conclusion to each of them can be stated in the same way. My reasons for distinguishing them from one another are two. First, Socrates does not need the three assumptions 'Disagreements are about what is good', 'Disagreements lead to quarrels', and 'One loves what one believes to be good' to force Euthyphro to admit that what is loved by Zeus will not be loved by his father (that is, what is loved by one god is not loved by another). Second, I think that the purpose of the third argument is to employ the notion that an *εἶδος* is a paradigm.

The dialectic then returns to the first argument. Euthyphro turns it around by saying,

*Ἀλλ' οἶμαι, ὦ Σώκρατες, περί γε τούτου τῶν θεῶν
οὐδένα ἕτερον ἑτέρῳ διαφέρεισθαι, ὥς οὐ δεῖ δίκην
διδόναι ἐκείνου ὃς ἂν ἀδίκως τινὰ ἀποκτείνῃ.*
(8b7).¹

The move is ad hoc, but not out of place. Euthyphro

1. But Socrates, I think that no god disagrees with another god that it is not fitting to punish he who killed another unjustly.

would be well-advised to give up his faith for a definition; a definition like "Whatever is pious is loved by all the gods".

Socrates allows Euthyphro this move: ...τολμῶσι λέγειν οὐδ' ἀμφοιβητεῖν, ὥς οὐκ ἔπειρ ἁδικοῦσιν¹ γε δοτέον δίκην(8c10) But, Socrates has a way of getting around it. He says that none would deny this in general, but in specific cases they do not know on which side of the principle a particular act falls. And at this point, Socrates could go on to say that they do not know, because they do not know the εἶδος which is in all pious actions, or the εἶδος in all impious actions.

The fourth argument begins from where the first starts, but it follows along a different direction. In answer to the question 'What are piety and impiety?', Euthyphro says 'Doing as I and Zeus do: punishing those who are wrong doers'. As we have seen, Socrates gets a wedge underneath this answer by saying that it is not the right kind of answer. Now, there is no reason why Euthyphro could not say which characteristic is common to his action and the action of Zeus. Moreover, such an answer would have been consistent with his religious

1. They (who have done wrong) would not dare to say or dispute that they should not be punished if they have done wrong.

beliefs. The reason that he does not say anything of this sort might be that he is dull, or that Plato is speaking for him.

Suppose that Euthyphro were to say to Socrates "My actions and the actions of Zeus share the characteristic 'y'. So, whatever else shares this characteristic also is pious, because the characteristic 'y' defines the class of pious things." An answer such as this would satisfy the methodology of the Meno. What is wrong with it, though, is that it is much too liberal - at least for Plato's liking. One need only say that one takes a certain characteristic to be that which defines a class, and one thereby generates a class. More important, there is no reason why one cannot say that the class which has been in this way generated is the class of pious actions. Since there is no logical connection between the characteristic 'y' and piety, one can say just that. The argument holds not only for moral concepts but also any concept. The concept 'chair' could be used in any way one likes, given the methodology of the Meno. But, Plato wishes to exclude such possibilities. He does so by making the characteristic 'y' the same with piety-itself.

There are two questions of fundamental importance¹ in the fourth argument. One of them I have already noted; and so has most every other commentator on the Euthyphro.

1. See p.47

Very little has been said about the other. This other is,

Εἰ ὅτι μάλιστα με Εὐθύφρων διδάσκειν ὡς οἱ θεοὶ ἅπαντες τὸν τοιοῦτου θάνατον ἡγοῦνται ἄδικον εἶναι, τί μᾶλλον ἐγὼ μεμάθηκα παρ' Εὐθύφρονος τί ποτ' ἐστὶν τὸ ὅσιόν τε καὶ τὸ ἀνόσιον; (9c2).¹

Socrates is, I think, questioning the plausibility of the 'common characteristic' model of definition. And I think that the purpose of the fourth argument is to establish what might be called a logical connection between characteristic 'y' and piety-itself. The nature of the connection is that characteristic 'y' is piety-itself.

The 'common characteristic' model ends exactly where the fourth argument gets going. Once one has said something like "ὃ μὲν ἅν πάντες οἱ θεοὶ μισῶσιν ἀνόσιόν ἐστίν, ὃ δ' ἅν φιλοῦσιν, ὅσιον", (9d2)² one satisfies all the conditions of the model. But, Socrates goes on to ask,

... τὸ ὅσιον ὅτι ὅσιόν ἐστιν φιλεῖται ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν, ἢ ὅτι φιλεῖται ὅσιόν ἐστιν; (10a2).³

Now, why does Plato have Socrates say 'φιλεῖται ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν',⁴ instead of 'θεοὶ φιλοῦσιν τὸ ὅσιον'?⁵ (If

1. Suppose that Euthyphro should teach me that all the gods believe that such a death is unjust, would I have learned from Euthyphro what the holy and unholy are?
2. "What all the gods hate is unholy, and what all the gods love is holy."
3. Is the holy, because it is holy, loved by all the gods; or is the holy holy, because it is loved by all the gods?
4. 'It is loved by the gods.'
5. 'The gods love the holy.'

the latter, the question would be 'Do the gods love the holy, because it is holy; or is it holy, because the gods love it?'). The reason is that if 'φιλῶ'¹ is in the present indicative active, the resulting question is irresolvable.

Of course, Euthyphro does not quite understand, so Socrates gives a few examples. These examples are, though, quite misleading, and they play no part in the argument. Socrates contrasts 'φερόμενον'² and 'φέρον'³, 'ἀγόμενον'⁴ and 'ἄγον'⁵, 'ὀρώμενον'⁶ and 'ὀρῶν'⁷.

The first member of each of these three pairs is a passive participle; the other member is an active participle. So, we would expect Socrates to draw a distinction between 'φιλούμενον'⁸ and 'φιλοῦν'⁹. And, he appears to draw just that distinction at 10a8. But, once made, the distinction does not occur again. Instead, we find Socrates using verbs in the present indicative passive; the verbal form of 'φιλῶ' in the question put at 10a1. There is a good reason for why the indicative active will not work.

At 10b1, we find the present indicative passive

1. 'To love'
2. 'being carried'
3. 'carrying'
4. 'being led'
5. 'leading'
6. 'being seen'
7. 'seeing'
8. 'being loved'
9. 'loving'

being used again.

*Λέγε δή μοι, πότερον τὸ φερόμενον διότι φέρεται
φερόμενόν ἐστιν ἢ δι' ἄλλο τι;*¹

If the 'διότι'² is to have any sense at all, a distinction between 'φερόμενον' and 'φέρεται' must be made out. There is a distinction; it turns on the use of 'τό'³ in connection with the participle.

Socrates is asking "Tell me whether the thing being led is being led, because it is led, or because of something else". Would it not seem more appropriate to ask "Tell me whether the thing being led is being led, because someone leads it."? If one wished to state a cause, it would be more appropriate. But, Plato is not here concerned with causes. If Euthyphro were to say 'The cause of a things being holy is that the gods love it', Socrates could still ask 'And why should the gods cause something to be holy by loving it?'.³

Let us consider the statement in which Socrates generalizes the point which he wishes to make.

*...εἴ τι γίγνεται ἢ τι πάσχει, οὐκ ὅτι γιγνόμενόν ἐστι γίγνεται, ἀλλ' ὅτι γίγνεται
γιγνόμενόν ἐστιν οὐδ' ὅτι πάσχον ἐστὶ πάσχει*

1. Tell me whether the thing being carried is carried, because it is being carried, or is it for some other reason?
2. 'because'
3. The phrase 'τὸ φερόμενον' means 'the thing being carried.'

ἀλλ' ὅτι πάσχει πάσχον ἐστίν· (10c1).¹

The general point is then 'If something is a becoming thing, it is a becoming thing, because it is becoming'. We could say that Plato is stating the necessary condition for being a becoming thing.

Socrates then introduces another premise. It is "τὸ φιλούμενον ἢ γιγνόμενον τί ἐστίν ἢ πάσχον τι ὑπό του"² (10c6). So, being loved is a necessary condition for being a loved thing. Is being loved a necessary condition of being a holy thing? Euthyphro has already admitted that the gods love the holy, because it is holy. Now, let us suppose that a holy thing is a beloved thing. Given the supposition, a holy thing is a holy thing because it is loved; or a holy thing is a holy thing, because it is loved by the gods. But, Euthyphro has admitted the opposite. He has allowed that being loved by the gods is not a necessary condition of being a holy thing. So, he cannot give as a reason for why something is holy that it is loved by the gods.

The significance of this argument is not that it undermines popular religion and offers a higher vision

1. If something is becoming or is affected (literally 'is suffering'), it is not becoming because it is a becoming thing, but is a becoming thing because it is becoming; nor is something affected because it is an affected thing, but is an affected thing because it is affected.
2. Is not the thing loved something which is becoming or something which is affected by something else?

of the gods. Euthyphro could avoid the consequence of the argument by simply denying that the gods love the holy because it is holy. What is of significance is the further use which Socrates makes of the argument.

Socrates uses the argument to establish a much more general claim.

... κινδυνεύεις, ὦ Εὐθύφρων, ἐρωτώμενος τὸ ὅσιον ὅτι ποτ' ἐστίν, τὴν μὲν οὐσίαν μοι αὐτοῦ οὐ βούλεσθαι δηλῶσαι, πάθος δέ τι περὶ αὐτοῦ λέγειν, ὅτι πέπονθε τοῦτο τὸ ὅσιον. (11a6).

We might take Socrates to mean that the *οὐσία* is that which is what pious things are. But, let us set this aside for a moment. The distinction between *οὐσία*² and *πάθος*³ is intended to undercut the notion that that which is common - because it is common - is that which defines the class of those things to which it is common. It may very well be that everything holy is loved by all the gods, but it is not for this reason that everything holy is holy.

Plato does, I think, believe that the *οὐσία* of

1. It seems, Euthyphro, that when I asked you what piety is, you did not want to explain (literally 'make obvious') to me the '*οὐσία*' of it, but wanted to tell me some '*πάθος*' of it which it has suffered.
2. 'The being (of piety)'. '*Οὐσία*' is derived from the participle of 'to be'.
3. 'An affection'. ('*Πάθος*' can also be translated as 'attribute'.)

piety is that which is what pious things or actions are. And if what I have said about the *εἶδος* is correct, then the *οὐσία* of piety is the same as the *εἶδος* of piety. On the other hand, one might think that the *εἶδος* is the essence of the *οὐσία* of piety. But, there are two reasons which count against this. At both 5d and 6d Euthyphro is asked to state the *εἶδος* because of which all pious things are pious. If the essence (*εἶδος*) of piety is different from the *οὐσία* of piety, then that which makes pious things pious is not that which is what piety is (if the *οὐσία* of piety is that which is what piety is). And if the *οὐσία* of piety is not that which is what piety is, then the *εἶδος* is both and the *οὐσία* is nothing. The second reason is that if the *εἶδος* is in all pious actions, while the *οὐσία* is that which is what piety is, then the *εἶδος* cannot be the paradigm of pious actions. The *εἶδος* may be common to all, but as we have seen that is not sufficient.

The 'ontology' of the Euthyphro has a very important consequence. Since there is something which is what piety is, and since that which is what piety is is that which is what pious things are, it follows that one knows which things are pious by knowing that thing which is what pious things are. How does one come to know that which is piety-itself? - by seeing piety 'bare and naked' itself. And one learns what piety-itself is by being led to see it.

Plato states this point in the Symposium, but the logic behind it has been established in the Euthyphro.

The Platonic analysis of coming to know what a thing is is two-fold. If a thing is an ordinary object, one cannot know what it is until one knows that special object which is what the ordinary object is. But, might not there be a 'supra-special' object which is what the special object is? If there is, there shall also have to be a supra-supra-special object which is what the supra-special object is. But, this infinite regress can be avoided.

If by looking at the special object one can know what it is, then one will not need to look at a supra-special object to find out what the special object is. I think that Plato does believe that one can know what piety-itself is simply by looking at it - not the ordinary every day kind of looking, but a special kind. Or, in other words, one can know what an x-itself is by having acquaintance of it. Knowledge of x-itself is knowledge by acquaintance. This is the second part of the Platonic analysis of coming to know what a thing is.

Chapter V

A review of some of the literature
on the Meno and Euthyphro

The early dialogues have not received the attention which has been given to the middle and later dialogues. The reason for this is, I think, the way most scholars of Plato have viewed the early dialogues. The early dialogues are said to be 'Socratic'.

Socrates is characterized by Plato as a teacher of those who think that they know but do not (Apology), a critic of popular religion (Euthyphro), a man with a divinely inspired mission (Apology, Crito, Phaedo), a sort of mystic (Symposium), a midwife (Theaetetus), and so on. The role which seems particularly appropriate to the Socrates of the early dialogues is that of a teacher who does not himself know anything, because the early dialogues generally end up in 'aporia'.

Perhaps the commentators have tended to forget who wrote the early dialogues. It would appear that they believe a chronicler wrote them. But, Plato's Meno could not have been the Thessalian general. When Plato's Meno first gives an account of virtue, he says that there is the virtue of a man, the virtue of a woman, and so on. Then, after Socrates explains the sort of answer which

should be given, Meno says that virtue is "*ἀρχεῖν οἷόν τ' εἶναι τῶν ἀνθρώπων*"¹ (73c). This is the virtue of a man, but Meno has already admitted that women, children, and slaves have virtues. Either Meno is quite senseless, or it is Plato's Meno who is speaking. And in the Euthyphro, Plato's Euthyphro states assumptions which are inconsistent with one another. Socrates need only play upon these assumptions to become a critic of popular religion.

The most obvious way in which Plato 'manipulates' the figures of the early dialogues is by having them agree, quite placidly, to whatever question Socrates has just pulled out of his bag. But, what is even stranger is that if someone does not understand a question which Socrates has put, he says that he understands after Socrates gives an explanation that is even more obscure than the question.

The point which I am trying to make is simple: The early dialogues rest on a philosophic method. I should hope that this study lends support to the claim. Whether the historical Socrates is responsible for the method or not is not important.

I would like to review some of those things which have been said about the Meno and Euthyphro.

1. "The ability to rule men."

The single most important issue for Meno's paradox and the theory of recollection is the use which is made of 'ζητῶ'. The term is first introduced into the Meno at 73d. Meno says "ἐν τι εἶδος ζητεῖς κατὰ πάντων". The introduction of the term is quite natural, since Socrates uses the 'ἀποβλέψαυτα' metaphor at 73c. Moreover, Socrates himself says at 74b "πολλὰς ... ἢ ἡκάμεν ἀρετὰς μίαν ζητοῦντες".

The view which I have forwarded about the paradox and the theory of recollection is that they stand as one. Plato does not solve the paradox. He introduces a gratuitous assumption which entails that learning is remembering. The theory simply accommodates the paradox. But, this is not something which the commentators, on the whole, have seen through.

Shorey says that Meno's argument is lazy and¹ eristic.² Taylor says that it is a sophistic puzzle.³ For Friedlander, it is a piece of eristic.³ All three allow that the business with the slave-boy is somehow proof of the theory of recollection. Of course, it should also then be a proof of the paradox. There is, though, a more interesting view. B. Phillips says that

1. What Plato Said, p.157

2. Plato, The Man and His Works, p.135

3. Plato, The Dialogues, p.282

"...(the paradox) contains in embryo one of the essential contentions of sophistic nominalism as a philosophical position".¹ So also, then, should the theory of recollection contain the essential contentions of sophistic nominalism.

Socrates wishes to learn what virtue is. Most commentators agree that he should be taught. But, what is extraordinary is that the gross analogy which Socrates uses at the beginning of the dialogue is not found out. There Socrates asks 'How can I know whether Meno is rich, if I do not know Meno; similarly how can I know whether virtue can be taught, if I do not know virtue?'. Does Socrates mean that 'teachability' stands to virtue as 'being rich' stands to Meno?

If knowing Meno (by acquaintance) is sufficient for knowing that he is rich, noble, and handsome, so also might knowing virtue be sufficient for knowing that it can be taught. But, if so, two senses of knowing are being conflated. If someone were to say to me 'Do you know the fox-trot?', I would say 'Yes, but I don't know how to do it'. I would mean that I can tell whether another is doing the fox-trot or not, and that I cannot do it. If 'virtue' is analogous to the fox-trot, one could

1. "The Significance of Meno's Paradox", Classical Weekly, XLII. Reprinted in Plato's Meno, pp. 77-83.

know virtue without knowing how to be virtuous. Socrates, though, thinks that a moral education would be being taught what virtue is. Thus, 'knowing what' and 'knowing how' get squeezed together.

Shorey does not say a word about the rather unfortunate analogy Socrates uses. Taylor and Friedlander also let the analogy go unnoticed. What is of importance is that the analogy presupposes that virtue is some one thing which can be known through acquaintance. It contains the fundamental assumptions of the Meno, and for this reason is very important. Let us see how the 'What is x?' question has been handled.

Everything that Plato ever wanted in his 'What is x?' question is given to him by most commentators. Notice something which Shorey says:

He (Socrates) wishes to know the essence of the thing (*οὐσία*), that which it is as or qua such, the form owing to which it is what it is...¹

We have seen the significance of 'that (thing) which is what another thing is'. Perhaps Shorey has also seen this, but I do not think that he knows what it is which he has seen. He is not alone. Grube fogs up the issue when he says that Plato supposes that there is "the existence of something beyond them (the xes) which they resemble".² On the other hand, Friedlander and Taylor do

1. What Plato Said, p.155
2. Plato's Thought, p.10

not even get as far as Grube. Friedlander does not explain but only restates the distinction between *οὐσία* and *πάθος*.¹ Taylor, though, fails of being faithful to what has been said. He thinks that Socrates wants to know that in virtue of which religious duties are religious.²

Robinson's discussion of the 'What is x?' question is unusually analytic. From his discussion there emerge a number of points which I would like to take up. Chapter five of Plato's Earlier Dialectic is devoted to the methodology of the 'What is x?' question.

The first thing which Robinson points out is that Socrates often rejects an answer not because it is false but because it is not the right kind of answer.³ So, Robinson and I share the same purpose. Both of us wish to see what sort of answer would qualify as the right kind of answer, given the conditions which Socrates has set down.

Robinson characterizes the method as being two-fold.⁴ He sees the opposition of the one and the many as different from the 'What is x?' question. My view is that the opposition of the one and the many is made

1. Plato, the Dialogues, Vol.2, p.87
2. Plato, p.149-50
3. Plato's Earlier Dialectic, p.50
4. ibid, p.50

possible by the distortion of the ordinary 'What is ...?' question. 'Which one thing is virtue - and do not tell me the many?' makes sense, only if the one is what the many are. And this means that 'What is virtue?' is already ruined as a question. One says what justice is by saying that it is a virtue; but there is nothing which is what virtue is. Virtue-itself is some one thing.

Robinson has not seen the point which I have just made. His failure to do so leads him into a little bit of Platonic nonsense. In trying to straighten out what might be meant at 71a-b of the Meno, he says "You cannot know...what sort of thing x is until you know what x is. Thus you cannot know whether virtue is teachable until¹ you know what virtue is". There is something basically wrong with this statement: 'What is this?' and 'What sort of thing is this?' should be one and the same question. If not, then to the question 'What sort of thing is this?' we could say 'A teachable'. But what tells most against the attempt to separate the two is that if the separation is possible, we could say 'What sort of thing is this chair?'. Plato has both a use and an answer for this question. His answer is 'This chair belongs to the class of chair, and has been made to belong to it by that which

1. *ibid*, p.50

is what the chair is; namely, 'chairness'.

This nonsense gives rise to a problem: How can you know whether a thing is a chair, if you do not know what 'chairness' is?¹ Instead of deporting the nonsense, Robinson tries to make it a respectable citizen.

Robinson's thesis about the methodology of the 'What is x?' question is this:

It seems that his (Socrates') procedure implies... that there is a word or set of words which enshrines a knowledge of the thing X in some way in which the word X does not enshrine a knowledge of the thing X even for those who understand it and use it correctly.²

The question which Robinson must now answer is "What knowledge does the word x enshrine, and what knowledge does it not enshrine?". His answer is

...he (Socrates) knows what the word X means (and what it means is surely the thing X), he nevertheless does not know what the thing X is.³

Upon this view, when Socrates asks Meno 'What is virtue?', he refers to something and he knows to which thing he is referring.

Robinson's thesis gets him into a very basic philosophical difficulty. The problem turns on the assumption that one can refer to the thing which is x by saying 'x' (as if 'x' were only a name), but not know

1. *ibid*, p.51

2. *ibid*, p.54

3. *ibid*, p.54

what x is. This assumption underlies the following statement which Robinson has made: "Every statement giving X's essence serves to identify X; but not every statement serving to identify X gives its essence"¹. If by 'giving x's essence' Robinson means 'saying what x is', then at one level what he says is surely false. One does not say who Socrates is when one says that Socrates is a man. At the level of x-itself, this problem does not arise. Suppose that 'x' is 'virtue'. Upon Robinson's account, Socrates knows the thing which is virtue but does not know what virtue is. What, then, does Robinson mean by 'knowing what virtue is'?

If knowing what a thing is is knowing its essence, then x, which is both possessed by all xes and the essence of all xes, must have an essence. But, will there be an essence of the essence of x so that one can know the essence of x? If so, the essence of the essence must have an essence as well; and so on.

Robinson gets himself into this bind, because he does not see the difference between the Meno and the Euthyphro.² He says that he finds a duality in these two dialogues. On the one hand, he thinks that at 74b-c of the Meno and 6e of the Euthyphro Socrates wishes to have

1. *ibid*, p.54

2. *ibid*, p.55

x identified. On the other hand, he thinks that Socrates is asking for essence of x at 74d of the Meno. I think that he is wrong about the passage at 6e; but that is not what gets him into trouble. On the basis of the passage at 74d, Robinson characterizes essence as "that single identical something whose presence in all the many Xes is guaranteed precisely by the fact that we call them all Xes"¹. But the Socrates of the Euthyphro would say: Do they possess x, because we call them xes; or do we call them xes, because they possess x?

This difficulty arises through a conflation of 'meaning' of 'reference', when 'meaning' is needed to make this position coherent. This can be seen in the conclusions which Robinson comes to about the methodology of the 'What is x?' question.

The first conclusion that Robinson comes to is that Socrates must assume that the word 'x' is univocal.² Fair enough; the passage at 74d provides evidence for this conclusion. Robinson then goes on to establish three other conclusions.

These three other conclusions are held in place by one general consideration. It is this:

...if Socrates can point to the very thing that virtue means, and Meno can thus instantly recognize it, why are they asking what virtue is and, according

1. *ibid*, p.55

2. *ibid*, p.58

1

to their own account failing to find out?

Robinson thinks that this consideration requires the assumptions that x has an essence, that the essence is 'real', and that the essence has a structure which can be explicated.

We have already seen the difficulties involved in saying that x has an essence. And, if x does not have an essence, then the essence of x cannot be real. It is the third conclusion which is of importance; for upon it hangs the other two.

Robinson has already admitted that a word means the thing to which it refers. Now, he uses this assumption to say that Socrates knows the thing which is being referred to, but does not know what the thing is. He further assumes that Socrates thinks that there will be words which are not synonyms for 'x' ² and which can be used to explicate or unfold the structure of x's essence. ³ If these words which are not synonyms do refer, we shall have essences of essences to infinity. And, if they do not refer, there is no reason why x should refer either. But, Robinson wants to say that 'x' does refer, because he wants to say that Socrates knows x but does not know what x is.

1. *ibid*, p.57

2. *ibid*, p.58

3. *ibid*, p.58

Plato can avoid whatever difficulties Robinson has in store for him by simply assuming that one comes to know what an x-itself is through acquaintance with it.

I think that this is Plato's position and that it is wrong, but it is not an incoherent position. The Platonic essence is not wrapped up in an infinite number of foldings. If it were, no amount of unfolding would ever be enough unfolding.

Texts

Meno, Volume III of Platonis Opera, Oxford, 1961

Euthyphro, Volume I of Platonis Opera, Oxford, 1961

Protagoras, Volume III of Platonis Opera, Oxford, 1961

Translations

I suggest that the reader consult Jowett's translations of the dialogues to which I refer. Jowett avoids using metaphors to translate what Plato has said when Plato does not use a metaphor. The five dialogues to which I refer are all translated in volume I of The Dialogues of Plato (Random House, 1937).

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